

ATTENDANCE POLICY
OF



Tarbert Comprehensive School

Ratified by the BOM on: 20/6/17

Introduction

Tarbert Comprehensive is a stand-alone co-educational second level school situated in a wide catchment area of rural north Kerry and west Limerick. The School is acutely aware that education plays a central role in each child's development and outlook. Therefore in keeping with its own mission statement, the School offers every child the opportunity to fulfil his or her own potential. In order to realise this potential, high rates of student attendance, participation and retention are vital.

Tarbert Comprehensive School through its various educational programmes and experiences also plays an important part in ensuring that its students grow to independence and that they are in a position to benefit from life's opportunities. Given its important influence on each child's development and outlook, the School seeks to ensure that high and regular rates of attendance, participation and retention are encouraged, enabled, embedded and evident.

Knowledge about the factors that influence the attendance of groups and individuals can help school staff, management, students and parents to plan and implement a team approach to attendance as well as focus on what the school can change and identify any interventions that may be necessary and that are known to have a positive outcome.

This Policy is designed to inform and focus the whole School community on the benefits of regular school attendance.

1. Research and the Importance of Regular attendance

Research has pointed to the benefits of good school attendance and the impact on students when school attendance is poor, for example:

- high levels of attendance has a positive impact on teaching and learning (McCoy *et al*, 2014; Claes *et al*, 2009);
- established links between good attendance, student engagement and staying at school to complete the Senior Cycle (Smyth, 1999; McCoy *et al*, 2007; Byrne and Smyth, 2010);
- well-established impact of poor attendance on a student's educational outcomes (McCoy *et al*, 2007);
- research evidence showing that even when they stay at school to Leaving Certificate stage, those students with poor attendance do less well in the exam and are less likely to go on to further study (McCoy *et al*, 2007);
- the impact of poor attendance on wider aspects of a student's life, such as weak peer relationships, risks of engagement in anti-social activity and poor family relationships (Hibbett and Fogelman, 1990; Carroll, 2011);
- the pressures for students and their teachers when students miss out on classes and key parts of the curriculum (Lupton, 2004; Wilson *et al*, 2008).

This body of knowledge about the factors that help or act as barriers to attendance is the foundation of good planning for school attendance. As noted in research commissioned by the former National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB), interventions that insist on attendance without an understanding of the barriers faced by students, or the supports and interventions that can help, are in danger of being ineffective (Morris and Parashar, 2012, p. 14).

2. Rationale for an Attendance Policy & Attendance Statement

- To comply with the Education Welfare Act 2000.
- To comply with Túsla Guidelines 2016
- To inform and support day-to-day management of attendance
- To maintain accurate records of school attendance by students

- To form habits of regular and punctual attendance in students
- To discourage absenteeism, lateness and unwarranted withdrawal of students during the school day or school term
- To develop a sense of personal responsibility in students for their school going years and for the rest of their lives
- To make students aware that a good school attendance record enhances success at school

3. Goals & Objectives

- Attendance by all students for the full school year
- Attendance by all students for the full school day
- Minimum rate of absenteeism
- The early detection and correction of patterns of poor attendance
- Accurate recording of students' attendance
- Establishing closer contacts between the school and families of students with attendance problems

4. Roles and Responsibilities

Given its important role in a child's development, attendance cannot be seen as the sole responsibility of any one person or group. All stakeholders within the education system must play an active part. The following section outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Management, parents, teachers, various positions of School management and administrative staff.

Parents

- To ensure regular attendance of students and avoid unwarranted absences
- To ensure punctuality of students
- To notify the School in writing of the reason for all student absences: such notice should be provided prior to the absence if possible or otherwise immediately afterwards in the form of 'Absence Slips'. Telephone or oral messages relating to student absences must be confirmed in writing as soon as possible
- To provide to the School reliable contact telephone numbers and alternative 'emergency' numbers so that the School may contact parents/guardians or other authorised parties if necessary. Mobile numbers will be needed for the school SMS text messaging service.
- To adhere to the procedures set out in this Policy for the withdrawal of students from School during the school day
- To adhere to the procedures set out in this Policy for the late arrival of students to School during the school day
- To monitor their children's involvement in extra-curricular activities closely so that any broad involvement does not negatively impact on school and/or subject attendance rates
- To acknowledge and, where necessary reply to communications from the School in relation to attendance issues
- To monitor and maintain due vigilance around their child's/children's' attendance through the use of the VSware system
- To restrict holidays/vacations to periods of school closures and restrict removing their children from school during term time. Parents have a legal duty to ensure that their child is at school on every day that the school is open, unless there is a genuine reason for him

or her not to attend. Therefore, the school cannot give 'permission' for holiday absences during term time. As per Túsla advice, if a parent decides to take a child out of school for holidays, the parent must provide the Principal with a letter to say they are doing so and that they are aware of the implications.

Subject Teachers

- To take a roll-call in every class. Late arrivals are noted.
- Roll call is based on the returns for period 1. In the event the VSWare system is not functioning then manual paper roll calls will be sent to the Administration Office for period 1 on the school's Roll call slip
- PE teachers will send the absence for period 1 on the PE tablet device or manually
- To alert relevant staff if there are concerns about student absences or unauthorized absences
- To monitor student absences for patterns in their subject area and alert relevant staff and/or parents as necessary
- To discuss students' attendance records with parents/guardians at Parent/Teacher Meetings
- To impress on students the importance of regular attendance and ensure they understand their responsibility to 'catch up' on work missed during their absence
- To be conscious of students potential involvement in a broad number of extra-curricular activities and be mindful that this involvement does not negatively impact on school and/or subject attendance rates

Year Heads

- To monitor student attendance regularly
- To seek and file written explanations for student absences (Absence Slips) from parents/guardians
- To provide 'Absence Slips' booklets to students where necessary.
- To receive 'Absence Slips' signed by parents/guardians from students who have been absent and to remind students to deposit these slips in the box provided for the purpose in the reception area on their return to school. Absence slips will then be recorded by the office administration staff and later filed by Year Heads.
- To log relevant attendance information as informed by notes and/or journal entries on VSWare
- To keep a record of matters relating to attendance/absences of students e.g. failure to provide Absence Slips from parents/guardians.
- To note trends in absence records of individual students e.g. Monday or Friday absences and to bring this to the attention of the parents/guardians of the students concerned and notify the Deputy Principal at Year Head meetings
- To send standard Absence Letters to parents/guardians where frequent absences occur
- To contact parents/guardians where unauthorised absences occur or are suspected and to notify the Deputy Principal of same

Administration Office

- To record any absences notified to the office manually by teachers at Class 1 each day

- To modify the roll call to show any student arrivals after 9 a.m. For recording purposes, a student who goes home before 11.00am will be marked absent for the entire day
- To send a text alert to parents indicating student absences each morning
- To liaise with Year Heads on matters relating to attendance records or Absence slips of students.
- To notify any teacher who may have errors on the Roll call or whose roll call for whatever reason has not been recorded on VSWare and rectify same.
- To notify Year Heads of student absences from telephone contacts with the school
- To maintain a record of students late arrivals and withdrawals from school during the school day (and their return to the school)
- To ensure that when a student is withdrawn from the school, a parent/guardian personally accompanies the student who is leaving the school and signs the appropriate record before the student is withdrawn.

Chaplain

- To monitor student attendance
- To liaise with class teachers, Year Heads and the Deputy Principal on a pastoral level in matters of concern around student absenteeism and non-attendance.
- To engage with families when school attendance is affected by personal issues such as long term illness or bereavement
- To make contact with the Education Welfare Officer as required by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 in instances where the welfare of a student may be a concern after consultation with the Principal and/or Deputy.

Deputy Principal

- To monitor attendance records regularly
- To encourage regular attendance by students
- To receive and discuss reports from Year Heads on issues relating to attendance for each year group at Year Head meetings
- To monitor and investigate unauthorised absences of students from the School or classes during the school day
- To contact parents/guardians where unauthorised absences are suspected
- To send text messages to parents at random intervals or when suspicious patterns of absenteeism emerge
- To make bi annual and yearly reports to Túsla as required by the Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- To send standard Absence Letters to parents/guardians where accumulated absences occur
- To notify parents by text message when in-house exam grades become available on VSWare. The notification should also draw Parental/Guardian attention to school and subject attendance rates

Principal

- To ensure that adequate systems are in place to record attendances and absences of students

- To inform parents/guardians and students of procedures for the notification of absences or withdrawal of students from the School
- To remind students and parents/guardians of the importance of regular attendance and the negative impact of frequent absences on student progress

Board of Management

- To ensure that adequate whole school systems are in place to promote full attendance and limit non attendance
- To ensure that the School captures, measures and analyses school-wide attendance patterns (at the final Board meeting each year in June)
- To submit to Túsła's Educational Welfare Service its Statement of Strategy for School Attendance and re-submit any amended versions thereafter

5. Attendance Records and School Procedures

Section 22 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 requires that each school has ways of identifying students who are at risk of developing school attendance problems. To comply with this requirement, Tarbert Comprehensive School keeps records for all student absences and failure to attend.

The School

- VSWare is the school administrative software package. Teacher and administrative input allows the accurate monitoring of student attendance.
- The Education Welfare Act obliges the school authorities to inform Túsła once a student who is under 16 years of age has accumulated 20 absences in any one year; this includes all absences whether due to illness or any other genuine reason
- A visual record of individual student attendance and absence records is available for Parents/Guardians to view at all times on the VSWare system

Parents

- Parents/Guardians are required to give advance notice in writing of all foreseen absences giving a reason for the absence. Letters/notes from parents/guardians regarding a foreseen student absence will be given by students to their Year Head prior to the student's absence.
- Where an absence is unforeseen, the parent/guardian is required to notify the School by telephone on the morning of the absence. This notification must later be confirmed by an absence slip stating a reason for and duration of the absence.
- Parents/Guardians or a person nominated by the parents must present themselves to sign the 'Departures Book' at the School office when a student is withdrawn during the school day. If the student later returns for part of the school day he/she must again sign back in
- Students who arrive to school after 9 a.m. must present a note from a Parent/Guardian explaining the cause of lateness.

Students

- Absence Slips' signed by parents/guardians from students who have been absent are deposited in the box provided in the reception area on their return to school. Slips and

letters relating to absence will then be recorded by the office administration staff and filed by Year Heads.

- Where a student is to be withdrawn from the School during the school day, the student must present a written request from the parent/guardian to the Year Head or Deputy Principal before they leave.
- It is school policy that once students have arrived at school in the morning they do not leave the school grounds for any reason unless they have written permission from a parent and also have the permission of the Deputy Principal or Year Head. This applies to all students, including those who are repeating Leaving Certificate.
- Only students from Tarbert village who go home for lunch may leave the school at lunch time. They will need to bring a letter from parents or guardians at the beginning of the school year. Parents are advised that it is only wise to give permission if the student is going home to a supervised environment. If this is not the case the student should stay at school during lunch time.
- Funerals are a very emotional and upsetting time and can be extremely difficult when the school community is directly affected. The school will always try to manage these times as sensitively and sensibly as possible. The first advice we give is that students attending a funeral should always do so in the company of a parent and it is preferable that they do not attend school on the day in question. However, if they do come to school then the usual rules for leaving school for an appointment apply. Students who have their own transport and who have written permission from parents to attend the funeral must follow normal school procedures and must not provide transport for others.
- Students who are given permission by parents to use their own or parents cars to come to school have a huge trust placed in them to behave responsibly in relation to school attendance. This trust involves, arriving at school on time, remaining in school for the full day and not providing unauthorised transport for other students (please see the separate *Policy on Student Drivers*).
- Students, who are late for class in the course of the day without adequate explanation, will have a late note recorded on the VSWare system. These late records will then be reviewed by the class teacher and notified to the Year Head. The student may be given lunchtime detention if it is felt that a pattern of deliberate lateness is developing.
- Failure to comply with any of the above procedures for leaving the School during school hours is a breach of the School's code of Behaviour.

6 (a) Strategies to Encourage School Attendance

High rates of school attendance are encouraged by:

1. Developing a welcoming school *climate*. Students in the school are made feel welcome. This is done by staff in the form of praise or when students are asked questions by staff that shows a personal interest in them. In our view students who feel welcomed in turn feel supported and are less likely to be absent from school on a regular basis. Parents are equally valued and welcomed in this way.
2. Developing strong *relationships* between students and teachers. Positive student–teacher relationships can build an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. This can lead to higher student engagement and attendance rates. These relationships can grow even stronger when

students mix with teachers through curricular and extra-curricular activities or by simply showing genuine care for them.

3. Developing high teacher *expectations*. Student attendance is better when teachers set high hopes and standards for students of all abilities. These high hopes and standards can extend to every part of school life – from exam performance to sporting success as well as engagement, behaviour and attendance. In this way students are enabled to reach their full potential, whatever that potential is.
4. *Rewarding* good attendance regularly at the end of First Year, Second Year and Third Year. A specific Christmas and summer assembly of these students salutes and rewards good attendance in the form of certificates and/or prizes.
5. *Emphasising* to the students the importance of good attendance at our morning assemblies. Senior students in particular are reminded that regular and high levels of attendance has a direct correlation with exam performance.
6. *Encouraging* the full attendance by students particularly on days prior to school breaks.
7. Raising the *awareness* of attendance as a matter of priority for students, parents and teachers. This is done by openly discussing its importance and highlighting it in key documents and prominent places/events.

The importance of high attendance rates is made familiar by way of:

- Various meetings including Parent Association, Staff, Parent-teacher and Student Council
- Information evenings
- Newsletter articles, updates and reminders
- School assemblies
- Student reports via VSWare
- Posters
- Maintaining a whole school attendance notice board
- Distributing the Túsla leaflet *Dont Let your Child Miss Out*
- Developing a whole school strategy on attendance from 2017 to 2020
- The existence of this Policy

6(b) Strategies to prevent Poor School Attendance

1. Informing and reminding students and parents of the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 in relation to attendance.
2. Informing parents through personal contact, newsletters and meetings, of the negative impact of absenteeism on the students' education.
3. Regular analysis of attendance to monitor overall truancy and punctuality levels;
 - ✓ To identify trends and patterns in attendance;
 - ✓ To identify specific times of school year, week or day when attendance levels are lower;
 - ✓ To monitor the attendance of vulnerable groups or individuals;
 - ✓ To track attendance for a specified period of time or subject.
4. Early identification of poor attendance patterns with a view to the notification of same to parents so that early intervention strategies with groups and individuals can be initiated. Strategies include;
 - ✓ Setting targets for improvement in attendance and reduction of absence;
 - ✓ To trigger early interventions at whole-school, class or group level and individual level;

- ✓ To identify individuals with poor attendance and intervene accordingly. Offering personalised support and engagement with families and their children, both at key transition points (First Year & LC1) and when children are at risk of disengaging from education.
5. Text messages or phone call to parents at random intervals or when suspicious patterns of absenteeism emerge.

7. Intervention strategies & Supports

The School aims to identify the needs of each individual student and so intervene accordingly. Our intervention approach is three tiered.

Tier 1 - Initially the school supports attendance through a wide range of basic strategies that cover the entire school community such as:

- A whole school attendance Policy
- Parents information evenings
- Parent teacher meetings
- Newsletters and flyers
- Various programmes such as 1st year Mentoring
- Assemblies etc.

Tier 2 - The next tier of intervention is more targeted and occurs in instances where poor attendance has been identified by the school as a concern. The supports and strategies used here can be varied or combined so as to address the identified need. An important emphasis here is in maintaining links with outside agencies and interventions that encourage connectedness with the school, the student, the family and the community, addressing both personal (including parent–child conflicts) and practical issues (such as access to health and mental health care) around disengagement. Strategies may include:

- One-to-one meetings,
- parental consultations,
- pastoral support,
- Linking to outside agencies and resources e.g. LINK, CAMHS, local youth clubs and sporting organisations that support school strategies.
- Private counselling services etc.

Tier 3 - It is anticipated that the above strategies will have a positive outcome in the vast majority of interventions. Where these approaches are limited in success then more intensive strategies will apply, including:

- A combination and expansion of the aforementioned approaches
- reduced curricula and diverse programmes choice,
- Differentiated teaching etc.
- Intervention of outside agencies e.g. Túsla, Local Education Welfare Officer, NEPS, Gardaí,

8. Targets

Attendance targets provide:

- ✓ A clear measure of improvements in attendance levels in the school;
- ✓ A way of checking the impact and benefit of attendance strategies;
- ✓ Raised awareness about attendance among management, staff, students and parents;
- ✓ An ethos of continuous improvement;
- ✓ A sense of commitment to attendance and a sense of pride in the school's achievements

Each year Tarbert Comprehensive School correlates an Annual Attendance Record for Túsla.

These records are also discussed at Board of Management level. The record highlights:

1. the total number of days lost through student absence in the entire school year;
2. the total number of students who were absent for 20 days or more during the school year;
3. total number of students who were suspended;
4. total number of students expelled in respect of whom all appeal processes have been exhausted.

Tarbert Comprehensive is consistently below national statistics for truancy, students with over 20 days absences, student suspension and expulsion rates.

The school sets itself the following targets:

1. Raising awareness of and creating a positive whole school attitude towards regular attendance in order to reduce absences.
2. Implementing a coordinated overarching strategy* to guide improvement in attendance rates. (*Appendix 2)
3. Ensuring that all stakeholders within the School know their roles and responsibilities through the various actions listed in the strategy.

9. Review and update

This Attendance Policy was updated in June 2017 to incorporate changes which resulted from the introduction of VSWare and also to incorporate new Túsla guidelines.

It will be reviewed in 3 years' time or if/when new procedures, guidelines are introduced, whichever is sooner.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Terms

<u>Term</u>	<u>Description of Term</u>
BOM	The Board of Management governs the school on behalf of the patron and for the benefit of students. It includes representatives of parents, teachers, trustees or patron, the principal and the community.
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and is a service that provides assessment and treatment for young people and their families who are experiencing mental health difficulties
Comprehensive School	Comprehensive schools combine academic and vocational subjects
Co-educational	Referring to schools attended by both sexes
Curriculum	Set of subjects, programmes and activities delivered by a school
DES	Department of Education and Skills
Extracurricular	Programmes or student activities not falling within the scope of a regular school curriculum and usually organised for the social or physical development of the student
Junior Certificate	The Junior Certificate examination is taken after three years of post-primary education
Leaving Certificate	The traditional Leaving Certificate examination is the terminal examination of post-primary education
Learning Support & Resource	Learning support & Resource caters for children with learning delays or with a high-incidence disability such as mild general learning disability and dyslexia
LINK	Learning Initiative North Kerry is a school completion programme and is a partnership between seven schools and agencies that came together in 1998.
NEWB	The National Education Welfare Board is responsible for monitoring school attendance patterns both at Primary and Post Primary level. All schools must submit individual and overall attendance returns during the course of the year and at the end of the school year
Special Needs	Referring to specialist education requirements of children who face physical, mental or developmental challenges
Syllabus	Outline of a subject or course
Túsla	The Child and Family Agency (called Túsla) is a statutory organisation, established in January 2014. It is required to support and promote the development, welfare and protection of children, and support and encourage the effective functioning of families
VSWare	The School's computer software administration system. Each family in the school has a unique password and login capability designed for easy access to monitor their child's progress and attendance

